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Stories in MEDNEWS use these abbreviations after a Navy medical professional's name to show affiliation: MC - Medical Corps (physician); DC - Dental Corps; NC - Nurse Corps; MSC - Medical Service Corps (clinicians, researchers and administrative managers). Hospital Corpsmen (HM) and Dental Technician (DT) designators are placed in front of their names.

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Headline: Inhalant abuse may bring last breath
By HML (FMF) Brian J. Davis, U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa

OKINAWA, Japan -- In an effort to address one of the fastest growing drug problems in the United States, Naval Hospital Okinawa and the Armed Forces Network Okinawa produced a video titled "Last Breath." The documentary, which is slated to air as a special report on the Armed Forces Network throughout the Western Pacific, Europe, and selected areas in the U.S., provides an unsettling look at the allure and popularity of inhalant abuse as well as its potentially lethal effects.

Lt. Cmdr. Chris Ward, NC, and Lt. Cmdr. Craig Mallak, MC, led the project that promotes awareness of "huffing," the

deadly practice of inhaling fumes from household chemicals such as edge dressing, solvents and aerosol room deodorizers. After three service member deaths in the Western Pacific because of huffing within a one year period, Capt. J.W. Sentell, MC, executive officer of U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa decided that Okinawa's military community needed to know more about the dangers of huffing.

Ward and Mallak led a team of physicians, nurses, corpsmen and military public affairs specialists in a six-month project to research, write and produce the documentary-style video, which was scheduled to air worldwide on the Armed Forces Network January 21. The video will also be distributed throughout Okinawa to Department of Defense Dependent Schools as well as Navy and Marine Corps Commands.

Narrated by Lt. Cmdr. J.C. Nicholson, MC, the video integrates interviews and comments by medical professionals with vivid scenes of an inhalant abuser played by Hospital Corpsman Charles M. Mahon, on a downward spiral of self-destruction--ultimately winding up on an autopsy table.

"It's like playing Russian roulette", said Hospital Corpsman First Class Kennan S. Milch, who is in the video, shaking his head as he views Mahon's "body". Regarding the needless deaths of the three service members, he added, "They didn't die in battle, they didn't die defending their country -- they died trying to get high."

The American Academy of Pediatrics stresses that the most effective way to prevent inhalant abuse is by educating parents, teachers and school-aged children of the signs, symptoms and dangers of huffing.

"Last Breath" offers an eye-opening look at the devastating long term and often fatal effects of one of America's fastest growing drug problems.

"The one time that they do it or try it could be their last time," said Milch, who is a Navy Mortician. "Then, they would be in my hands".

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Headline: Portsmouth improves access to better assist customers

By Lt. M. Hernandez, MSC, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth

PORPSMOUTH, Va. -- It's a question every Military Treatment Facility deals with. "How can our beneficiaries be better served?" One way is by reaching out to beneficiaries where they are. Doing so may not be easy, but at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, it is how business is conducted these days.

Through the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery's and the TRICARE Customer Advocacy Program's initiative, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth established four very successful TRICARE Assistance Centers (TAC). These centers, which are located in Navy Exchanges throughout the Virginia Tidewater area, provide beneficiaries convenience when using their TRICARE medical plan.

The TAC is an example of improving access and thinking of the customer first. While a family or spouse is shopping at the exchange, health care concerns can also be addressed. Perhaps all that is needed is an explanation about where and how to enroll with TRICARE, or how TRICARE portability works.

A TAC can also provide enrollment status verification or allow members to make a primary care appointment or accomplish primary care manager changes.

"Having a TRICARE Assistance Center within the Navy Exchange is ideal. We are reaching our beneficiaries where it is convenient for them. We offer a more relaxed atmosphere for helping our beneficiaries while saving them time," said Health Benefits Advisor Margie Garrett.

Tidewater beneficiaries are excited about TACs and appreciate the way the Medical Center is trying to make a difference for them. Support for TACs from all levels has been tremendous. Thanks to the Navy Exchange and the space they provided, the Medical Center was able to set up and fully equip each TAC and staff them with the most experienced Health Benefits Advisors in the business.

Health Benefit Advisor Cathy Lewis, who works in the largest TAC located in the world's largest Navy Exchange said, "When I get a warm smile along with a sincere thank you, it makes being here for our beneficiaries and what I do all worth while."

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Headline: Making the rounds while Green
By Doug Sayers, Naval Medical Center San Diego

SAN DIEGO -- He can be seen every morning with clipboard in hand, making his way through the crowded courtyard on his way to visit "his" patients. Nurses and Corpsmen greet him as he makes his rounds and walks the passageways with practiced familiarity, but this territory is somewhat foreign to a war fighter.

He is Staff Sgt. Gary Gustafson, the Marine Corps liaison at Naval Medical Center San Diego. The patients he visits are Marines who have been admitted to the Medical Center for treatment.

While officially touted as "the Navy-Marine Corps Team," differences do exist between the two sister services. There are different ranks, different commands and different uniforms -- and sometimes, a different language. Gustafson bridges the gaps, providing information coordination between the Navy medical staff and active duty Marines, their family members and some retired Marines.

"I make sure the paperwork gets done quickly. I provide immediate, personal attention for Marines who become hospitalized, which is a vital component of the Marine Corps standard of 'taking care of our own,'" said Gustafson.

Visiting the wards and tackling paperwork are only part of the picture. As Marine liaison, Gustafson must also conduct barracks inspections to ensure cleanliness,

facilitate temporary duty paperwork, monitor Marine medical evacuations and assist Naval Medical Center San Diego's staff by providing administrative support for Physical Evaluation Boards and Limited Duty Boards.

Accountability is a word that pops up often in Gustafson's conversations. He says he is accountable for ensuring Marines hospitalized at Naval Medical Center San Diego are taken care of and their individual commands are kept informed and aware. He is accountable for his charges in everything but direct hands on patient care. The patients are, after all, members of the Marine Corps family.

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Headline: Getting glasses becomes easier at Bremerton
By Judith Robertson, Naval Hospital Bremerton

BREMERTON, Wash. -- Military personnel are busy people. The last thing they need is a long wait on service that improves their ability to see. That was the thinking behind consolidating the Optometry Clinic to the Optical Shop at the Naval Hospital and thereby creating a one-hour, one-stop eye glasses shopping experience for active duty personnel.

"This is very unique in military medicine," said Cmdr. Ricky Toyama, MSC, head, Optometry Dept. "There are only so many optical labs in the military anyway and many aren't anywhere near the docs."

"After people have their eyes examined, they now don't have to get back in the car and go to find the optical lab. It is very convenient now," Toyama said. "Being co-located with the Optical Shop has an added benefit also, the Optician can assure the fit is perfect."

The new fast-track process has gone through its shakedown and is functioning well, according to optometrist Lt. Joseph Trull, MSC.

"In most cases our active duty patients can come in for their eye exams and walk out with glasses in under an hour," he said.

Active duty personnel have priority at all times, and they also have the option of 'frames of choice,' which gives them a variety of frame styles to choose from.

"Retirees can also get glasses made, but they may have to make a second trip, depending on volume, and they are limited to one frame, the standard-issue dark brown style," Trull said.

Family members may get eye exams at the clinic, but they must get their glasses made elsewhere.

The new clinic provides convenience for all concerned, and its new location is being publicized locally so everyone can take advantage of this new service.

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Headline: Portsmouth accredited by College of American Pathologists
By Cmdr. K.L. Nawn, MC, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth

PORPSMOUTH, Va. -- Naval Medical Center Portsmouth has

been awarded accreditation through September 2001 by the College of American Pathologists' (CAP) Commission on Laboratory Accreditation based on the results of a onsite inspection conducted September 1999 in the Laboratory Medicine Department.

CAP reviews all aspects of laboratory medicine including performance improvement, quality control, adequacy of facilities, quality of laboratory services provided, safety, staff qualifications and education, and equipment.

CAP is a medical society serving the laboratory community throughout the world and is a leader in laboratory quality assurance and accreditation. The CAP Laboratory Accreditation Program, which began in the early 1960's, was a pioneer in health care accreditation.

This was the first CAP inspection for NMCP since moving into the Charette Health Care Center.

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Headline: Anthrax question and answer
>From Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

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Question: Since we have known about the anthrax threat for years, why implement this program now?

Answer: During the 1990s, countries hostile to the United States increased their capability to weaponize and deliver anthrax. Terrorist organizations sympathetic to our potential adversaries have become more active. Additionally, advancement in weapon delivery systems increased the capability of many countries that previously did not possess the technology to pose a serious threat. These factors led to the decision to protect the force with anthrax vaccine.

For more anthrax information visit the website at
<http://www.anthrax.osd.mil/>

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Headline: TRICARE question and answer
>From Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

Question: How can I enroll in TRICARE Prime?

Answer: If you are on active duty you will be enrolled in TRICARE Prime and assigned a Primary Care Manager. Other categories of beneficiaries can enroll on a voluntary basis either by visiting or calling the local TRICARE Service Center and completing an enrollment application. For more TRICARE information visit the website at
<http://tricare.osd.mil/>

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Headline: Healthwatch: West Point, Colorado walks among best in U.S.

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- Volksmarching clubs at West Point, N.Y., and Colorado Springs, Colo., sponsored year-round walks voted among the nation's best last year by members of the American Volksporting Association.

The 70,000-member association is the sport's U.S.

sanctioning body. Both the Volksport Club of West Point and the Falcon Wanderers in Colorado Springs have large numbers of service members on their rolls.

The West Point volksmarch takes participants all over the U.S. Military Academy campus. The Colorado Springs volksmarch focuses on the Garden of the Gods Park.

Volksmarching was brought to America largely by service members who received their first taste of the sport in Germany. Participants earn medals, pins, patches, steins or other souvenirs for completing noncompetitive walks over measured courses. There are two types of volksmarch in the United States.

The first is based on the European model and scheduled typically over one weekend. The second is the year-round or seasonal volksmarch. On these, local clubs measure their course, usually 10 kilometers, and designate a starting point. Walkers can do these walks any time during the year.

Association members voted the year-round volksmarch at Mackinac Island, Mich., as the nation's best last year. The march takes walkers past the historic sights of the island, located between the two peninsulas that make up Michigan.

The top 10 year-round events in 1999 were:

1. Mackinac Island, Mich.
2. Midtown Manhattan
3. Central Park, New York City
4. Fumee Lake, Mich.
5. Georgetown, Washington, D.C.
6. Kennebunk, Maine
7. Iron Mountain, Mich.
8. The National Mall, Washington, D.C.
9. West Point, N.Y.
10. Garden of the Gods, Colorado Springs, Colo.

To find the starting points for these walks, visit the American Volksporting Association Web site at www.ava.org for links to local clubs and a listing of scheduled volksmarches.

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Comments about and ideas for MEDNEWS are welcome. Story submissions are encouraged. Contact MEDNEWS editor, Earl W. Hicks, at email: mednews@us.med.navy.mil; Telephone 202/762-3223, (DSN) 762-3223, or fax 202/762-3224.

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